



Lawyers Working Together

by Ms. Yasmeen Nizam (Barrister and Solicitor)

Saint Thomas Lawyers Guild is named in honor of Thomas More who was a lawyer and 16th century chancellor of King Henry VIII. He was martyred because he remained loyal to his God. While he was on the scaffold he declared that he died “the king’s good servant but God’s first”. He was canonized a Saint by the Roman Catholic Church and is Patron Saint of Lawyers.


Every September, in honor of St. Thomas More, St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild celebrates a special Mass referred to as the “Red Mass” because of the blood Thomas More shed. Held at St. Joseph Basilica and presided over by the Archbishop, this celebration of the Mass asks God to bless the lawyers, judges and the court system for the upcoming judicial year. In 2007, in order to celebrate the Alberta Courts’ 100th anniversary, the Guild decided to sponsor an interfaith service and dinner focused on peace and unity that would include representatives from several faiths. Co-sponsoring the event along with the lawyer’s guild were Catherine Fraser, Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal of Alberta; Allan Wachowich, Chief Justice of Alberta Court of Queen’s Bench; and Gail Vickery, Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta. In the audience were Christians, Muslims, Jews, Members of First Nations, Hindus and Sikhs.

I was flattered when Rosanna Saccomani, a well known and respected lawyer, and spokesperson for the Guild approached me to request that I give a brief history about the first Muslim lawyer and judge in Alberta and reflect about what my faith meant to me. Similarly, five other lawyers from the Jewish, Christian, Sikh and Hindu communities were also requested to give their reflections. Ms. Saccomani during an interview with the Edmonton Journal, prior to the service stated that all lawyers, not just Christian have made a fantastic contribution to Alberta’s legal community and that this year, being the centennial year, “we (the Guild), just thought it would be fitting that there be an interfaith service to recognize that God’s hand is in everything we do”. On September 26, 2007, McDougall United Church witnessed a unique and engaging interfaith prayer wherein lawyers representing six faith groups reflected on their religion and bowed their heads together in prayer along with their respective spiritual leaders.

My reflection to the group essentially expressed that Islam was an integral part of my life and that it was a serene oasis from which I sought refuge from the material world. I also alluded to the challenges I faced as a Muslim woman lawyer in a post 9/11 world. I explained that the first Muslim lawyer and judge in Alberta was Edward Saddy, who was the brother in-law of Alberta’s first provincial cabinet minister, Larry Shaben. I also explained that one of the first Muslim lawyers in Alberta was my own dear father, Viqar Quraishi, Q.C. who was called to the Alberta Bar in 1967. Imam Tamir Ali of the Canadian Islamic Centre lead the prayers for the Muslim Community by reciting the Surah Al-Fatiha prayer:

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment.
You alone do we worship; You alone do we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path,
the path of those whom you have bestowed Your Grace. The path of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray.*

Barry Zalmanowitz who represented the Jewish faith stated that the “legal profession has always been accepting of other people’s faiths,” and that the event was a way of showing the broader community that we (lawyers) stand together. He also talked about the first Jewish judge, Samuel Lieberman, retired justice of the Alberta Court of Appeal. The Jewish prayer was lead by Rabbi David Kunitz



of Beth Shalom Synagogue who lead the Jewish Community in the “Prayer for Justice”.
O God and Creator; we thank You for the sense of justice you have implanted within us, and which always seeks, though at times haltingly, to express itself in daily life. Make us, O God, more steadfast in our desire to do your will. Teach us that the men and women around us are brothers and sisters, and fill us with such love for our fellow creatures that we will never wrong them or exploit them or take advantage of their weakness or ignorance. Kindle in us a passion for righteousness, grant us the vision to see that only justice can endure, and that only in being just to one another can we make our lives acceptable to you. May we by our thoughts and our deeds hasten the time when wrong and violence shall cease and justice be established on earth. Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Master Walter Breitreuz, Q.C. the representative lawyer, (Master) from the Christian community reflected on the history of the Christian faith during the first 100 years of the Courts’ establishment. United Church of Canada Reverend Kathy Hogman, Catholic Archbishop Richard Smith and Reverend Mark Zazula lead the Christian Community in the Lord’s Prayer, as follows:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and glory now and forever.*

The program ended with a prayer for peace that brought together the theme of this celebration:

*God of many names, Lover of all Nations,
We give you thanks for gathering us here today to celebrate
the Centennial year of the Law Courts in Alberta and for the
privilege of living in this city and country.*

*Bless the rich tapestry of this community;
The many strands of creeds, cultures and languages.
May we appreciate the blessings of one another in our diverse ways
and grow in solidarity with responsibility to strengthen this Canadian dream.
Recognizing those who first dwelt in this land,
May we learn from the sacredness of all creation.
Divine Creator, teach us your way of compassion.
Help us to banish hatred, despair and cynicism
So that peace may flourish among us.
May this interfaith gathering be a symbol of goodness,
generosity and harmony in our daily life.*